

in æternum vive by handydandynotebook

Series: [axecution](#) [9]

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Summary:

“Well...yes, it’s different.”

“Because I’m already ruined.” Billy holds her gaze, face blank.

“Well...you’re older,” Susan murmurs, imagines one of those accusatory eyes in the center of her palm and presses her thumb even harder.

“You think I’m ruined.” It is a statement, not an accusation.

in æternum vive

Author's Note:

part 9. there's rly 9 parts now ahahsiuhfsifh. um, this prolly ain't gonna make sense if ur not familiar with this 'verse. prolly hit the back button if that's the case, or not, idk, man, if u wanna be confused, that's ur choice. don't let me tell u what to do.

warning for mentions of the billy n karen thing.

The curb is overstuffed with Neil's things by dusk. Susan did most of the piling. She thinks she feels better with his things out of the house. She wants to get rid of the armchair but it didn't seem feasible tonight. More of a two person job— it isn't too heavy for her per se, the weight isn't really the problem.

It's the bulk. The shape. Maneuvering it out of the door will be much easier with an extra set of hands, but both Max and Billy are injured, and she'll be damned before she asks the neighbors for anything.

Susan isn't sure if it's the lack of sleep that has her on edge or if it's the enhanced precaution she must employ to prevent what she's done from being discovered, but she almost feels watched. Like everyone outside is waiting for her to make a misstep. The way Neil would wait for it sometimes, the way he would want her to misstep, really, to have some excuse to rip her magazines to shreds or chuck her cherry pie at the wall so she'd caw and shake or take his cock in her mouth even though she'd feel the furthest from aroused, one of many strategies developed to ease dangerous ire into something (anything) different.

Susan prickles with a deep, eerie unease. It's almost like the watching eyes are with her already. Embedded right beneath her skin. Any second, her flesh will pimple with them and they'll all blink open right here on her arms. Eyeball after leering eyeball, gazes in her sinful skin like scars, staring up in silent accusation.

Later in the evening, Max puts on an incredibly inappropriate movie about a Transylvanian transvestite that Neil would've utterly abhorred. Susan herself is as befuddled by the film as she is flush by its indecent audacity but with everything Max has been through lately, she doesn't have it in her to make her turn it off. Instead Susan sits close to her on the couch, every now and then reaching for her knee or her shoulder. Touches with gentle fingertips just to reassure herself of her daughter's presence. Billy watches it with them, curled up in that armchair, Neil's blanket bundled in his lap. He's quiet tonight. Susan wonders if the painkillers are making him drowsy.

When the credits conclude, Susan kisses Max's forehead and Max doesn't squirm away from her or grumble about it like she normally does. Settles for a nominal roll of the eyes. Bids Susan and Billy a goodnight anyway. Susan supposes Max can sense she's troubled, as much as she's trying not to let it show.

"Are you sleeping there again?" Susan asks softly, eyes sliding to Billy.

"Nah. Just don't feel like getting up yet."

"Okay." Susan studies him, sandy curls unbrushed, fingers tucked into the faded flag pattern in the blanket. "Can we talk?"

“I guess.”

“I heard you and Max earlier having a discussion about, um...that night.” Susan recalls the specific way he’d spoken the word ‘hysterical’ and swallows the sour taste it brings to her tongue. She knows exactly where he learned that from.

“Man, you really do phase through the walls, don’t you?”

“I do no such thing and I wasn’t even eavesdropping, you two just got loud.” Susan swallows and lowers her eyes to her hands as she folds them in her lap, pushing one thumbnail into the meat of her palm until it pinches. “I understand the point you were trying to make, Billy, but I didn’t appreciate how graphic you were with her.”

At this, her stepson scoffs. “As if anything I could say would be worse than what she already saw.”

“Precisely. Hasn’t she been through enough?” Susan presses harder. “You could’ve made your point without the gory details.”

“Gory details,” Billy repeats dully. “Guess you missed the part where Max described to me which of my insides went outside. But that’s different, right?”

“Well...yes, it’s different.” Susan glances up as her stomach twists uncomfortably and familiar, guilty whispers tickle the shell of her ear.

“Because I’m already ruined.” Billy holds her gaze, face blank.

“Well...you’re older,” Susan murmurs, imagines one of those accusatory eyes in the center of her palm and presses her thumb even harder, as if to gouge it out.

“You think I’m ruined.” It is a statement, not an accusation. “It’s whatever. You’re not wrong.”

Her mouth goes dry.

“I’m pretty good at bullshit, Sue. Saying the right things the right way, pushing all the right buttons.” Billy shrugs his shoulders. “Most

people aren't hard if you can pin down what they want. Show people what they want and they don't see the ruin. That's what I thought anyway, but maybe I'm so good at bullshit I'm just buying into my own, or maybe I'm just losing my touch..."

"Billy, what exactly are you talking about?" Susan sits up straighter, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth.

"You were right about Karen."

Susan's brow furrows as she tries to recall what— oh. Oh!

"K-Karen Wheeler?" she splutters, heart lurching in her chest. "Oh, Billy, please tell me you didn't."

"Nah. Got us a room at Motel 6 but when it came down to it, she didn't want me. I thought I did everything right but she still didn't want me, she just stared at me like my ruin was contagious and then she took off."

"She never should've wanted you to begin with," Susan declares as her skin crawls, shaking her head. "Adults shouldn't pursue those sorts of relations with teenagers. It's not right, it's not— wait, are you...? Um, Billy...you realize that situation, however it went, isn't on you, right? That woman never should've engaged with you at all."

And Susan struggles because she doesn't know precisely what to say or how to phrase it, but Billy's got a strange look on his face now, peering hard at the golden eagle's eye printed on Neil's blanket as if it has the answers.

"When it came down to it, she didn't want me...and now I'm here."

Suddenly, Susan thinks they aren't just talking about Karen Wheeler. A lump forms in her throat and when Billy looks back to her, the exhaustion in his wrung out gaze is so profound, it's unnerving.

"I hate it here. Can I trust you to take care of Max if I take off? You're not gonna settle down with another piece of shit who'll ruin her too?"

"No, never again," Susan swears earnestly. "I won't. Marriage isn't

anything good for a woman. It's nothing more than a glamorized trap. I'm through with pretending otherwise."

If she hadn't learned her lesson the first time, she certainly learned it the second time. She doesn't need it taught a third.

"I mean, I'm not a woman, but I'm not going to do it, either. The whole marriage thing. Having kids and all...I don't want it. Whatever shit Neil gave me ends with me. I'm not passing it on." Billy jerks his head, features scrunched like he got a whiff of something rotten. "Fuck that shit."

Susan would like to tell him something nice. Something optimistic. Something about good fortune in the future. But she has maggots in her stomach, in her veins, and she isn't quite sure what it is, but something about the way Billy looks has concern brewing in her belly. She can't quite put her finger on it. Something about his posture, maybe. Something about the way his voice sounds different tonight.

"What I will or won't do aside, you can't just take off, Billy."

"Sure I can."

"You don't have a concrete plan, you don't have enough money to sustain yourself, you haven't even finished school."

"I could drive cross-country, sleep in my car. Pick up odd jobs along the way. Bastard father's gone, so I'm fucking free as a bird, right?"

There's just. Something. Different. Susan purses her lips and peers at him searchingly.

"What's that look for? You want me to thank you?" Billy jeers, dark and mean as he lowers the recliner and it clicks into place with a snap. "Oh, thank you so very much for freeing me."

"Okay, Billy, what's going—"

"I'm just done, okay? I feel really done." He stands up, dumps the bundled blanket into the seat. "I'm gonna go for a drive."

And Susan really, really doesn't like the way he just said that. It sounded *wrong*, somehow. Foreboding slithers through her insides like a serpent, the hairs prickling along the nape of her neck as she follows him into the kitchen. Her heart drops like a stone when it isn't the Camaro keys he grabs.

"Those are the t-truck keys," she stammers out, borderline alarmed for reasons she cannot quite articulate.

"No shit, Sherlock. It's whatever, not like Neil's using it."

Billy starts toward the steps and Susan flails out a shaky hand, catches the hem of his shirt, tugs firmly back.

"Wait, p-please!"

"Jesus," he heaves out without turning around. "What is it? What more could you possibly want from me, Susan?"

Susan swallows and carefully embraces him from behind. She slides her arms under Billy's and mends his wounds, tucking her hands together higher up around his chest. She presses into him and holds him in a gentle hug.

"I'm ruined too," she confesses. "The best thing I've ever done is also the worst thing I've ever done. If that's not ruin, Billy, I don't know what is."

The keys jingle as they slip from Billy's fingers, clinking down to the linoleum. For a long moment he is silent. Then Susan feels him go lax.

"You say that like, that's it. Like you're never gonna do anything else. You have time to do your next best thing. Or your next worst thing, for that matter."

"So do you," Susan hums.

"Of course I do," he huffs as if annoyed but the words still sound watery. "I wasn't gonna...shit, what's wrong with wanting to go for a drive?"

Susan wets her lips. “Nothing. But it’s getting late and it’s dark, so why don’t you go tomorrow instead?”

“...tomorrow’s trash day.”

“Yes,” Susan agrees, even though she’s not certain what this has to do with anything. “Did you change your mind about keeping something? I can go out and grab it for you, if you want.”

“No.” Billy exhales a battered sigh that Susan feels catch in his chest. “But maybe you could take something to the curb for me, instead.”

“Sure.” She unfolds her hands, relaxes her arms.

Billy slips into the living room. Susan plucks the truck keys from the floor and returns them to the hook. When Billy comes back, it’s with Neil’s blanket.

“It’s just, I remember when he got it. When he unzipped the vinyl packaging off and took it out with the goofiest goddamn grin on his face.” Billy breathes through his nose. “This. The world’s ugliest blanket. He unfolded it and his whole face lit up like a Christmas tree.”

Susan inclines her head, tentatively reaches for his shoulder. Billy lets it land, blinks his eyes to her touch.

“My dad was so excited about this patriotic vomit, like he had no fucking clue how stupid it looked and it was this moment where not only didn’t I hate him, but I— I *couldn’t* hate him. He was stupid happy like a kid in a candy store and I loved him for it, so I can’t—I can’t, fuck!”

Billy spits out the last words as frustration and fury flare to life, blazing in his eyes like grease fires. His free hand forms a fist and Susan gingerly puts hers to his forearm before he can lash out, punch the fridge or the wall, or whatever he’d aim for. Billy never hits with just his arm, he hits with his whole body, and she doesn’t want him to hurt himself any more than he already has.

“It’s okay,” she murmurs.

“It’s not!”

“It is.”

“I don’t want to think about him like that, it makes all these stupid things confusing.” Billy clenches his jaw and turns away from her, eyes squeezed tightly shut. “It’s just shitty and it doesn’t change anything.”

“Are you sure you want me to throw it away?” Susan tilts her head. “We could put a duvet cover over it. Maybe that would help.”

“No, I want to be done with it. I want it on the curb, I’m just having trouble putting it there myself and it’s pissing me off.” Billy releases the fist and rubs his hand over his face.

“Okay. I’ll take it.” Susan steps back and fetches a garbage bag from beneath the sink.

She lightly licks her lips as she unfolds it, shakes it out. She holds it open and offers Billy a small smile she hopes is encouraging. He doesn’t return it. But he drops the blanket into the bag. It lands with the soft crinkle of plastic and his shoulders slump. Susan pulls the strings taut and ties them in a tight bow.

With that, she makes her way down the steps and out the backdoor. The square where the window used to be is sealed with a thin board. She’ll have to see about replacing that. All things in due time, she supposes.

She shuffles to the piled high curb, garbage bags and boxes of her dead husband’s belongings illuminated by the street lamp. Susan adds the blanket bag to the pile. There’s a glimpse of something in the corner of her eye, attention redirected as she realizes the street isn’t as empty as she initially thought. She whips toward it, makes out the shape of a creature tall and long, pale under the streetlight.

Susan feels her heart jolt but when she blinks, it’s gone. Maybe it was never there. She really needs to get some sleep. She lightly claps her hands to her cheeks and quickly retreats back into the house, trying to shake off the spookiness as she rejoins Billy in the living room.

“Thanks,” he mumbles, soft and weary.

“No problem...do you want to talk?”

Billy shakes his head, looks to the wall. She expects him to go back to his room but he doesn't. He stays right where he is while she dusts the baseboards, sprawled in the armchair and picking at the seams with his thumb. They share the space in silence but Susan doesn't feel anything awkward in it.

In fact, she doesn't particularly care to be alone tonight. Maybe Billy doesn't either. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to keep him in her sight.

Author's Note:

i don't rly believe in reliable narrators.